mail sorting and transmission leading to faster delivery of mail; (iv) More responsive customer care, through computerisation and provision of track and trace facility for accountable articles; and (v) Better working conditions and operational facility for employees.

Deficient postal services

355. SHRI MOTIUR RAHMAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the areas/places in the country which are deficient in postal services; and

(b) the steps being taken in the matter?

THE MINISTER. OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Postal facility in terms of daily delivery of dak at the doorstep is available throughout the country. Sale fo stamps and stationery is also provided at the doorstep through postmen in rural areas. Collection of letters through Letter Boxes is provided in villages with a population exceeding 300.

However, post office facilities are provided only in locations, which fulfil distance, population and income norms. This is because post offices in rural areas are heavily subsidised to the extent of 66 ^$_3$% in normal rural areas and 85% in hilly, tribal, desert and inaccessible areas while post offices in urban areas have to be financially self-sufficient. As on 31.3.2004, there were 1,55,669 post offices covering locations fulfilling all the three norms covering 1,41,814 G.P. villages. 7396 Panchayat Sanchar Seva Kendras (PSSKs) have also been set up in equal number of G.P. villages fulfilling only distance and population norms, to provide facilities for sale of stamps and stationery and registration.

(b) Since the Department is incurring a sizeable budgetary deficit which needs to be reduced, and the existing post offices and PSSKs are incurring more than permissible levels of loss, the Department is seeking to expand its network through rationalizing the existing facilities, keeping in view the distance norm, and by exploring more cost-effective means of providing postal services. This is in line with the policy directives contained in the 10th Plan.